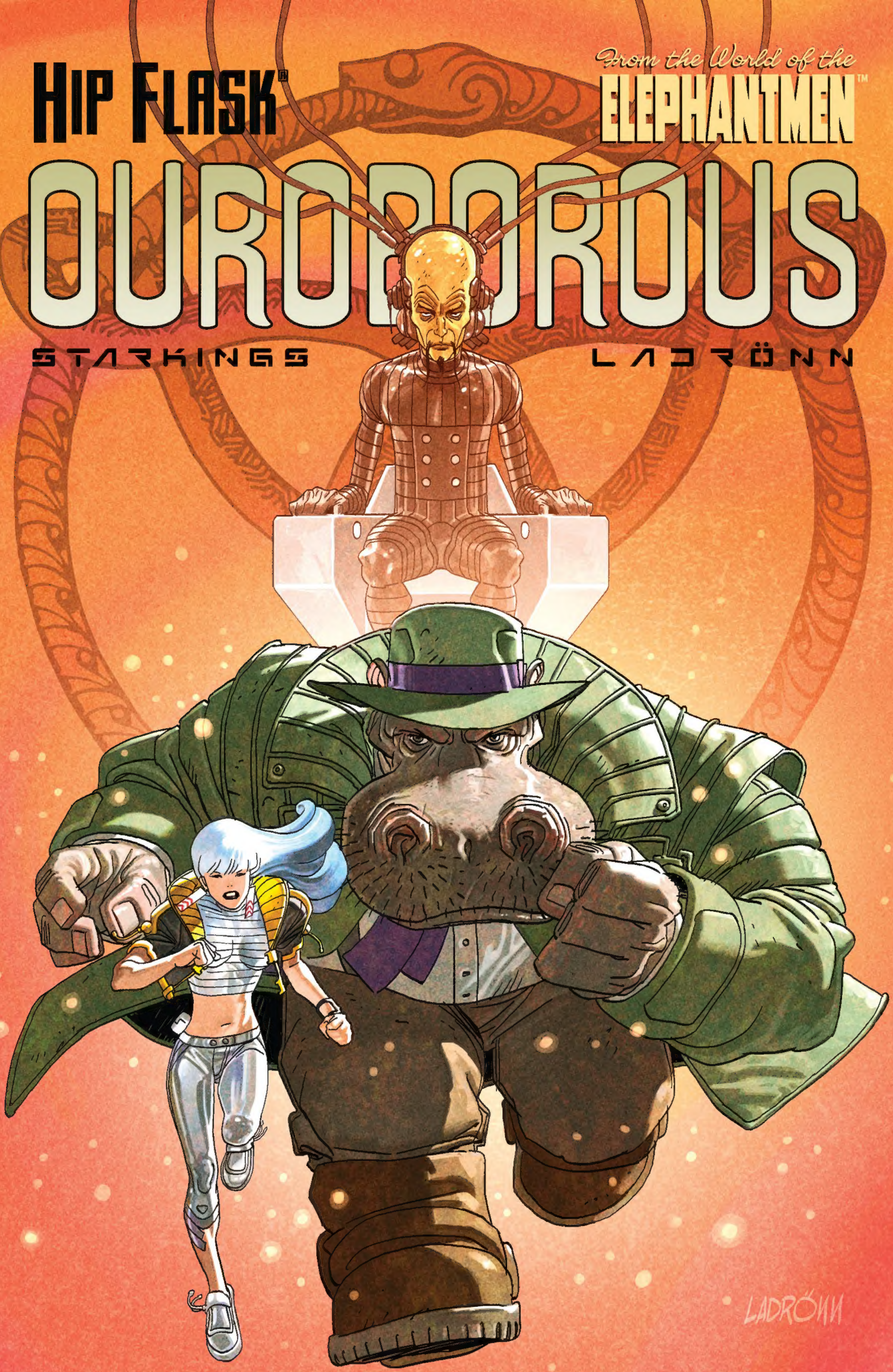
HIP FLASK®

From the World of the ELEPHANTMEN™

OUROBOROUS

STARKINGS

LADRÖNN



LADRÖNN

THE BIG HERE & THE LONG NOW
EPISODE TWO OF THREE

image

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COMICRAFT SINCE 1992

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATES THIS ISSUE TO ALAN DAVIS

"THE ONLY REASON
FOR TIME IS SO
THAT EVERYTHING
DOESN'T HAPPEN
AT ONCE."
ALBERT EINSTEIN

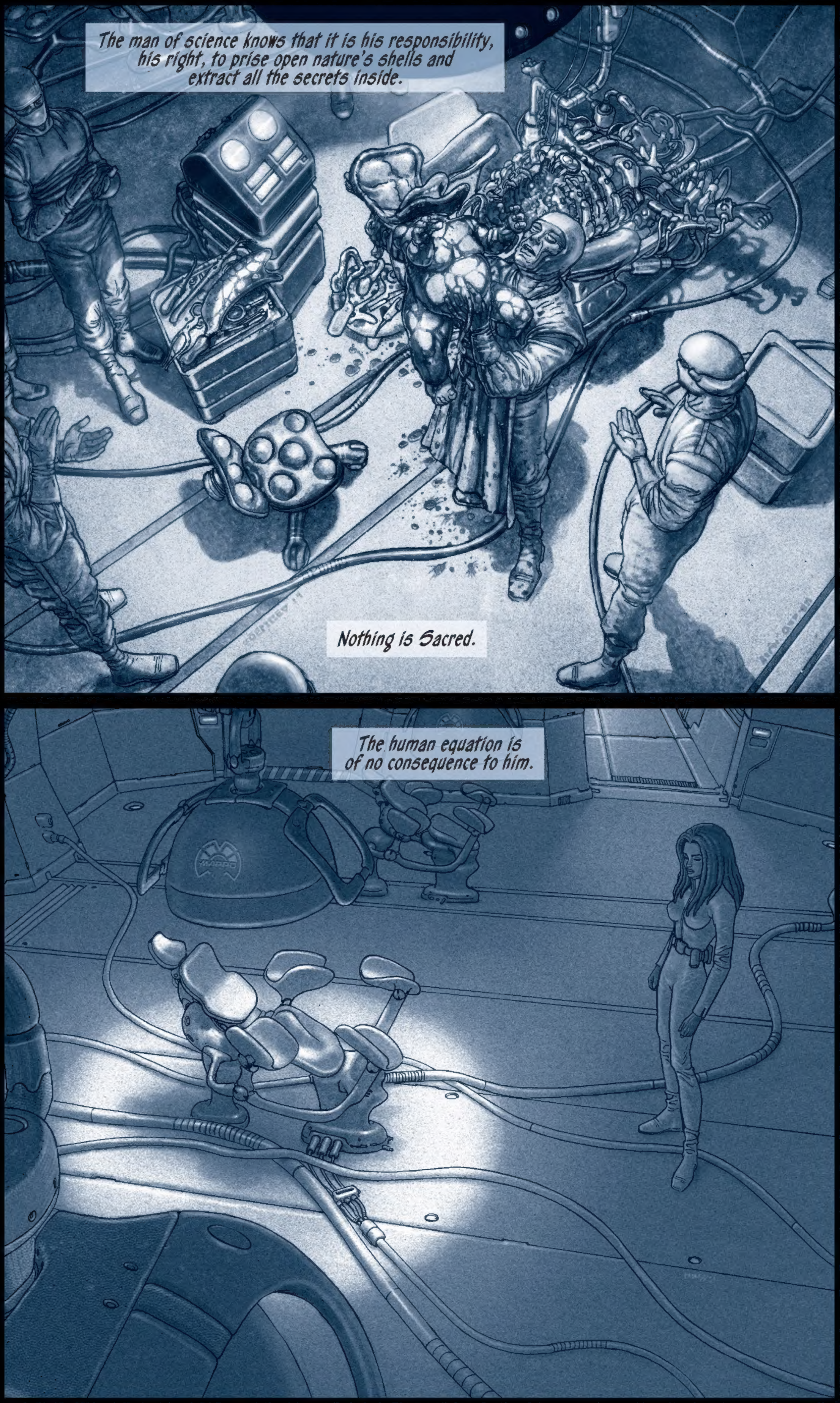
PROLOGUE

The atom was ripped open, DNA ruthlessly unravelled, the man of science now assumes dominion.

Nature's resources fall under his command.

Human life, expendable.

Animal life, expendable.


The man of science knows that it is his responsibility, his right, to prise open nature's shells and extract all the secrets inside.
Nothing is Sacred.
The human equation is of no consequence to him.

Those that believe the human condition to be superior to that of animals are fools.
Hatred...
Anger...

Suffering...

Fear...

Longing...

These are the base feelings of lesser creatures.

Feelings that trap them in the past.

The man of science looks to the future. The cloudy emotions of the here and now are not for him.

TIME! TIME IS PERHAPS THE MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY OF ALL!

He lives in the Big Here and the Long Now.

He owns the future.

THEY SAY THAT MANKIND'S TRUE ENEMY IS *TIME*. MORE SPECIFICALLY, WE ARE AT ITS MERCY BECAUSE OF OUR INABILITY TO CONTROL IT.

BUT MY EXPERIMENTS WILL PROVE ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT IT IS INDEED POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE THAT CONTROL.

THE MACHINERY HERE MAY RESEMBLE A TUNNEL, BUT DO NOT BE SEDUCED BY THE IDEA THAT WE TRAVEL *THROUGH* TIME... IT IS NOT *IN FRONT* OF US, OR *BEHIND* US...

NO, TO TRULY UNDERSTAND TIME, WE MUST ABANDON SUCH *LINEAR* CONCEPTS, AND ACCEPT THAT TIME IS SIMPLY A SHIFTING, KALEIDOSCOPIC PATTERN... ONE THAT ENVELOPS AND SURROUNDS US ALL.

Nothing is sacred.

Weaker men fear us.

They send us away.

Lock us up.

And in so doing, they further elevate us.

They make US sacred.

DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES · 2262

IT'S INTERESTING, I THINK, TO NOTE THAT THE CHINESE WORD FOR THE CONCEPT OF TIME IS A COMBINATION OF THE CHARACTER FOR TIME, THAT IS, THE PASSAGE OF TIME, AND THE CHARACTER FOR LIGHT.

IT'S EASY FOR US TO ACCEPT THAT LIGHT IS ALL AROUND US AS A CONSTANT, BUT WE DON'T THINK OF TIME IN THE SAME WAY.

WE WORK WITH LIGHT, WE BEND IT, REFLECT AND REFRACT IT, AND WE USE THE POWER OF SUNLIGHT TO DRIVE GENERATORS AND THEREBY LIGHT OUR CITIES...

HOWEVER, WE THINK OF TIME AS IMMUTABLE AND OURSELVES AS ITS SLAVES.

IT IS MY CONTENTION THAT WE ARE NO MORE SLAVES TO TIME THAN WE ARE SLAVES TO LIGHT.

NO, *LISTEN*-- I WANT MEN ON THE *ROOF*, I WANT MEN CIRCLING IVORY TOWERS IN A FIVE MILE RADIUS, AND I WANT EVERY *STREET*, EVERY *BUILDING*, EVERY *BACK ALLEY*, EVERY *DOORWAY*, *SEARCHED*.

YES! THE *ASSASSIN* WAS *OUTSIDE* THE WINDOW, HE WAS RIDING A *HOVERBOUT*!

WE MUST LEARN TO WORK WITH TIME, JUST AS WE WORK WITH LIGHT...

IT WAS ABANDONED AT THE FOOT OF THE BUILDING, *BLOOD SMEARS* ON THE HANDRAIL.

I DON'T *KNOW*! MAYBE ONE OF YOU *CLOWNS* WAS ACTUALLY DOING THE JOB YOU'RE *PAID* TO DO! *FIND HIM*!

...THEN WE WILL BE ABLE TO PLUCK MOMENTS OUT OF TIME JUST AS WE PLUCK *SUNBEAMS* OUT OF THE AIR, AND *COMMAND* THEM TO DO OUR BIDDING!

MISTER HORN, SIR -- WE NEED TO GET YOU *AWAY* FROM HERE--

NO, *PURCHASE*. WE WILL JOIN THE *HUNT*. THE SHOOTER'S *ON FOOT*, HE CANNOT HAVE GOT VERY FAR.

HUFF HUFF HUFF

GET OFF THE STREET, ASSHOLE!

HEY! WATCH WHERE YOU'RE GOING!

THAT GUY MUST BE BUSTIN' FOR A PEE OR SUMTHIN'...

EITHER THAT OR HE JUST *KILL'D* SOMEONE.

OR *ROBBED* 'EM. CHECK YER POCKETS.

HUFF HUFF

URNH!

STAY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE OR SO HELP ME I'LL BLOW--

--YURRGGH!

KRKRAK

HEY, YOU THERE--

MOVE AWAY FROM THAT WEA--

SHTOOM SHTOOM

SHTOOM SHTOOM

CHK CHK CHK

ARRRH!!

THERE.

THE GUN.

FTUP

:AHH:

FTTK

I REMEMBER YOU.

IT'S THE ONLY LANGUAGE YOU *MONKEYS* UNDERSTAND, ISN'T IT?

THE SILENCER.

MISTER PURCHASE, WE HAVE OUR KILLER.

THE BIG HERE & THE EPISODE

LONG NOW TWO

Ouroborous

MISTER *FLASK*, DID YOU *HEAR* ME?

WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN THE NEXUS OF A *CAUSALITY PARADOX?*

UHH...

CAN YOU CONFIRM THAT YOUR BODY WEIGHT IS ONE THOUSAND, ONE HUNDRED AND *ELEVEN* POUNDS?

ANY *BLEEDING* FROM THE EARS?

ARE YOU EXPERIENCING FEELINGS OF *DIZZINESS*, NAUSEA, LIGHT-HEADEDNESS OR *FATIGUE?*

THANK YOU, I'LL BE SURE THESE ARE RETURNED TO THEIR RIGHT *TIME* AND *PLACE.*

MISS -- *BLEEDING* FROM THE *EARS?*

HAVE YOU RECENTLY ENCOUNTERED *DOPPELGANGERS* OR BEEN AWARE OF CIRCUMSTANCES PECULIAR TO A *CHRONIC HYSTERESIS?*

MISS CASE?

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THEY *ARE!*

AND IF I *AM* BLEEDING FROM THE EARS IT'S BECAUSE *YOU GUYS* ARE ASKING TOO MANY *QUESTIONS!*

MISTER FLASK, WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN THE NEXUS OF A *CAUSALITY PARADOX?*

KNITTING SPAGHETTI...

WHO EXACTLY *ARE* YOU PEOPLE?

I THINK YOU TWO SHOULD COME WITH ME.

YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ON BOARD THE *T.R.U.S.T* TIME VARIANCE PORTAL, *OUROBOROUS.*

THE TRUST?

T-R-U-S-T.. IT'S AN ACRONYM: *TEMPORAL RESTORATION OF UNAUTHORIZED SPACE/TIME TRANSGRESSIONS.*

WE WERE BROUGHT TO YOUR ERA FOLLOWING THE DETECTION OF A *MAJOR* SPACE/TIME ANOMALY. ONE IN WHICH THE TWO OF YOU ARE CLEARLY *INVOLVED.*

WE'RE HERE TO ENSURE THAT COMPLETE RESTORATION IS EFFECTED.

I WOULD SUGGEST THAT YOU AWARD US YOUR TOTAL *COOPERATION.* YOU WON'T BE MISSED. THE *OUROBOROUS* DOES NOT MAKE ITSELF VISIBLE TO ANYONE OTHER THAN THOSE SELECTED BY THE *NAVIGATOR.*

LIVES OTHER THAN YOUR OWN ARE AT STAKE HERE.

THIS WAY PLEASE.

HIP, WHAT *IS* THAT? WHERE *ARE* WE?

WHEN I'VE GOT THAT FIGURED OUT, YOU'LL BE THE FIRST TO KNOW, SWEETHEART...

MYTER KROVOS.

I HAVE BROUGHT YOU THE INCURSORS FROM THE CPN, AS REQUESTED.

THANK YOU, CASPIAN.

SO, THE YOUNG GIRL AND THE TRANSGENIC.

QUITE THE *SIGHT*, AREN'T YOU, MISTER FLASK?

YOU'RE NOT SEEING ME ON MY BEST DAY.

NOW WOULD YOU PLEASE EXPLAIN TO US WHAT'S GOING ON?

NICE *HAT*, BY THE WAY.

YES, AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO EXCHANGE *PLEASANTARIES* WITH YOU, I'LL CUT TO THE CHASE.

AN ACQUAINTANCE OF YOURS, BY THE NAME OF *OBADIAH HORN*, HAS TAMPERED WITH TIME.

THE DISRUPTION HIS ACTION AFFECTED BROUGHT US HERE, TO THE BEGINNING OF THE ANOMALOUS ACTIVITY.

OUR ANALYSIS LEADS US TO BELIEVE THAT IT IS HIS INTENTION TO AVERT THE DEATH OF HIS CONSORT, *SAHARA*...

HUNH? SAHARA...! DEAD?

WE WANT YOU TO ENSURE THAT HE DOES *NOT* SUCCEED IN DOING SO.

WHAT? WHY WOULD WE--?!

WHO -- WHEN -- I MEAN, WHO *KILLED* HER?

WHO *ARE* YOU PEOPLE?

SHE'S DEAD, MISTER FLASK, BUT NOT DEAD *YET*.

...AND, OF COURSE, THE BIG NEWS THIS MORNING IS THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON OBADIAH HORN, PERHAPS THE MOST "CELEBRATED" OF ALL THE ELEPHANTMEN AND CHAIRMAN OF HORN INDUSTRIES. WHAT'S UP WITH **THAT**, RABBI?

WELL, HERMAN, THE ATTEMPT FAILED, BUT THE WORLD IS IN MOURNING, SHOCKED BY THE DEATH OF SAHARA, WHO GOT IN THE WAY OF THE ASSASSIN'S BULLET.

Y'KNOW, I'VE NEVER BEEN A BIG FAN OF HORN, BUT THAT SAHARA, BOY WAS SHE HOT! THING IS, HOW DID THOSE GUYS, Y'KNOW... HOW DID THEY--

TURN IT OFF.

ZABO, THE VALET. KILL HIM.

SCAN ARE

GATE 29

EYE OF THE NEEDLE · NOW

AAAIIIEEEEEEEEE!

WHERE IS HE?!

WHERE IS THE SILENCER?!

AH, MISTER *SERENGHETI*, I'M GLAD YOU ARE HERE.

I AM, OF COURSE, AWARE THAT MY AGENT HAS ENCOUNTERED SOME *PROBLEMS* COMPLETING YOUR ASSIGNMENT--

PROBLEMS?!

MY *DAUGHTER* IS DEAD, YOU *ANIMAL!*

I WANTED THAT *MUNT* WHO *PAWED* HER AND PUT HIS *SEED* INSIDE HER *DEAD*...

SAHARA I WOULD HAVE STRANGLED *WITH MY OWN BARE HANDS!*

PLEASE...

YOU'RE ALL NOTHING BUT FILTHY ANIMALS...

FILTHY--

FILTHY--

ANIMALS!

THE MOJAVE DESERT . NOW

SHOOT

SHO

PTCH!

DOCTOR NIKKEN! GET UP! QUICKLY!

WE'RE GETTING YOU *OUT* OF HERE!

I NEVER DOUBTED IT FOR A MOMENT, MISTER *SCLATER*...

WE WILL RETURN YOU TO LOS ANGELES TWELVE HOURS BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE TEMPORAL INCURSION.

I SUGGEST YOU USE THIS TIME WISELY.

PLEASE AVOID CONTACT WITH YOURSELVES AND FOCUS YOUR ENERGIES ON LOCATING YOUR FRIEND, *OBADIAH HORN*.

WHEN YOU FIND HIM, THE ACTIONS YOU WILL NEED TO TAKE TO PREVENT HIS CATASTROPHIC INTERFERENCE WILL BECOME EXTREMELY CLEAR TO YOU.

THIS IS *INSANE!*

I WANT *NO PART* IN THIS, KROVOS.

OBADIAH IS NO FRIEND OF MINE BUT I HAVE NOTHING AGAINST HIM, AND NO DESIRE TO SEE SAHARA DEAD -- AND *ABOVE ALL*, I HAVE NO *FAITH* IN MEN LIKE YOU WHO WANT TO PLAY *GOD*.

I AM *AWARE* OF YOUR AFFILIATIONS, MISTER FLASK. STILL, I AM *CONFIDENT* THAT YOU ARE THE RIGHT... *PERSON* FOR THIS TASK.

YOUR OBJECTIONS HAVE BEEN *NOTED*. BUT I AM NOT CONCERNED AS TO WHETHER OR NOT YOU RECOGNIZE OR SUPPORT THE TRUST'S AGENDA.

CASPIAN, INITIATE VARIANCE.

MUD'S *BLOOD* -- THAT'S *IT*? YOU CAN'T JUST --

OH... *NOW* I'M GETTING *NAUSEA!*

NO -- *NO!*

WHAT IN THE NAME OF SUTEKH'S SWAMP IS *VARIANCE?*

MYTER KROVOS, HOW CAN YOU BE SURE THAT THE ELEPHANTMAN -- *FLASK*, THE *TRANSGENIC* -- WILL ACT IN COMPLETE *ACCORDANCE* WITH OUR DIRECTIVE?

ON THE CONTRARY, I AM QUITE *CERTAIN* THAT FLASK AND HIS COMPANION WILL DO THEIR *UTMOST* TO *SAVE* THE LIFE OF HORN'S CONSORT.

"NOTE, CASPIAN, *THE NAVIGATOR* SELECTED THESE INDIVIDUALS AND WE MUST *TRUST*, AS ALWAYS, THAT SHE KNOWS BEST."

NO?!
OOOUFF...
HUNH?
DIDN'T YOU *HEAR* ME?! I WON'T *DO* IT!
DON'T THINK THEY *CAN* HEAR YOU NOW...
HIP... *LOOK!* WE'RE *BACK*... BACK AT GRANGER'S SHOP!
OH-OH... UMMM...
HEY-- I KNOW YOU! YOU'RE THAT PUNK FROM THE OTHER DAY...
I DON'T GET IT -- THAT WAS TWO DAYS AGO...
WHY YOU LITTLE-- YOU *MISCREANT!* WHEN I GET MY *HANDS* ON YOU...
YOU KNOW, I THINK I MISSED MY VOCATION, I SHOULD HAVE BEEN A--
THERE'S A-- UH, HE'S A-- OH FREAK, JUST *SCRAM!*

YOU FAT-GUTTED IDIOT! LET ME GET OUT FIRST AND I'LL PULL YOU--

MMFF!

NOT SO FAST--

I'M THINKING YOU TWO MIGHT FIT IN THAT CLOSET I LAST SAW YOU IN...

WHMP

SHMP

OKAY, I KINDA GET IT. WE'RE BACK IN TIME SOMEHOW -- IT MUST BE THE DAY BEFORE THE WHOLE THING AT THE BAVERSTOCK FOUNDATION...

AND, WHAT -- WE HAVE LESS THAN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO WARN SAHARA?

BECAUSE SOMEONE'S OUT TO KILL HER...

YEAH... LIKE SHE'S GOING TO BELIEVE US...

I'M NOT SURE I BELIEVE IT...

BUT, WAITAMINUTE, DIDN'T YOU CALL ME OVER HERE--

YOU'RE RIGHT! AND, AS SOON AS I'M DONE, YOU'RE GOING TO CALL ME AND GRANGER OVER HERE...

KEEP THE THREE OF US BUSY!

TIME VARIANCE!

AVOID CONTACT WITH OURSELVES!

INCOMING CALL FROM JEREMIAH GRANGER...

OKAY, SO WE'RE OUT OF OUR OWN WAY FOR A FEW HOURS, BUT WHERE DO WE START?

WELL, FOR WHATEVER REASON, THE TRUST TOOK THE VEHICLE I.D LOCATORS WE PICKED UP...

BUT I STILL HAVE THE TRACKING DEVICE I USED TO FIND THE SECOND ONE...

AND THE CAR THAT HIT THE MARLOWE BUILDING MUST STILL BE DRIVING AROUND OUT HERE RIGHT NOW...

YES, YES, WELL OF COURSE THAT WOULD BE THE CASE...

FATHER -- ARE YOU IN THERE? THERE'S -- AH -- SOMEONE HERE TO SEE YOU.

LAMBERT? NO, NO -- JUST TELL THEM TO *GO AWAY!* I'VE SPENT ENOUGH TIME WITH THE POLICE AS IT IS --

BAVERSTOCK FOUNDATION -- NOW

I'M AFRAID THIS WON'T *WAIT*, PROFESSOR WHITAKER.

WHAT--?!

LOOK HERE, YOU CAN'T JUST FORCE YOUR WAY IN HERE --

I CAN AND I *WILL*, PROFESSOR WHITAKER. I HAVE BEEN A SILENT PARTNER IN THE BAVERSTOCK PROJECT FOR YEARS.

PLEASE DON'T MAKE THIS DIFFICULT, I'M SURE YOU WOULDN'T WANT YOUR *DAUGHTER*, DOCTOR LAMBERT, TO BE *HURT*.

TIME, AS YOU *HUMANS* LIKE TO SAY, IS OF THE *ESSENCE*...

YOU HAVE SOMETHING I NEED, PROFESSOR WHITAKER...

YOU HAVE A MACHINE THAT IS CAPABLE OF SENDING ME *BACK IN TIME*.

NOW THIS IS INTERESTING...

LAPD

CONTROL? THIS IS TRENCH. I WANT A *SWAT TEAM* READY TO GO TO THE BAVERSTOCK FOUNDATION.

THERE'S A SITUATION.

LONG BEACH BOOKS · THEN

PERFECT, MIKI -- NOW, DO ME A FAVOR AND MAKE SURE YOU'RE FREE FOR A PICKUP AT THE AGENCY TOMORROW, MID-MORNING. I'VE GOT A FEELING WE'LL BE NEEDING A RIDE.

YOU GOT IT, BIG GUY!

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES!

AND HOW ARE WE GETTING OUT OF *HERE*?

WELL, I GUESS WE'LL JUST HAVE TO TAKE THAT!

LOOK AT THAT! THE CAR THAT CRASHED INTO THE MARLOWE BUILDING!

NOT A SCRATCH ON IT. FOR NOW, AT LEAST!

34.500X

WELL -- IT'S CERTAINLY A LOT CLEANER INSIDE THAN WHEN I *LAST* SAW IT -- UM, *WILL* SEE IT, AH--

SHALL WE TAKE IT FOR A SPIN...? I STILL HAVE THE KEY.

YOU ARE *NOT* GETTING ME IN THAT CAR! I KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO IT!

WHY NOT? WE WEREN'T IN THE CAR WHEN IT WAS FOUND. UH, WILL BE FOUND.

WHAT THE HELL IS THE INFORMATION AGENCY DOING HERE? AND WHY DOES IT HAVE TO BE *THAT* LARDASS?

OF COURSE, PERHAPS WE SHOULD HANG AROUND AND SEE IF THERE'S ANYONE *ELSE* WITH A KEY.

THERE'LL BE *TWO* SETS NOW... MAN THIS IS GETTING HARD TO KEEP IN MY HEAD...

HIP, WE COULD BE HERE *ALL NIGHT* -- WE DON'T HAVE THAT MUCH--

HELL'S TEETH...

FLASK.

CARE TO TELL ME WHY YOU'RE IN MY PART OF THE WATER?

WHY DON'T YOU TELL YOUR FRIENDS HERE TO PUT AWAY THEIR *GUNS* AND WE'LL SEE EXACTLY WHO'S OUT OF HIS *DEPTH*...

I SEE YOUR *TAIL* DIDN'T GROW BACK AFTER OUR LAST TUSSLE...

WHMPT

DLAWSON

SETTLE DOWN, FLASK... AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO GET EVEN WITH YOU...

I THINK MISTER HORN WILL WANT TO KNOW WHY TWO INFORMATION AGENTS ARE SNIFFING AROUND HIS PROPERTY.

Y'KNOW, I DIDN'T THINK THE AGENCY *PAID* YOU ENOUGH TO DRIVE A SPORTY LITTLE NUMBER LIKE THIS...

GIMME THE KEY.

BUT THAT'S NOT--

VANITY, DON'T TELL HIM *ANYTHING*. HE WON'T HURT US. EVEN HORN WOULDN'T WANT ANY TROUBLE WITH THE AGENCY.

I DON'T CARE WHO *YOU* WORK FOR, FLASK, *HORN INDUSTRIES* PAYS ME TO LOOK AFTER MISTER HORN'S INTERESTS.

TAKE THESE TWO TO IVORY TOWERS! I'M... *CONFISCATING* HIS CAR...

WELL, GOOD LUCK WITH THAT.

TO BE HONEST, I WASN'T UP FOR DRIVING ANYWAY...

FAILED TO GET A DRIVER'S LICENSE *TWICE* BEFORE I PASSED, YOU KNOW.

HEY, YOU'LL LIKE THIS, *HOW DO ELEPHANTMEN COMMUTE?*

THEY TAKE THE HIPPOPOTABUS! EVERYONE KNOWS THAT ONE.

SMILE, MONKEY.

WHOUF! YOU MUNTS DON'T GET ANY *LIGHTER*...

NOT THE *BEST* DAY TO LEAVE MY ANTI-GRAV TOOLS AT THE EYE.

SEE, *SERENGHETI* WANTS YOU =UNNH= *ALIVE*...

...AND *THERE'S* A MAN WITH EVEN MORE *CONTEMPT* FOR YOUR KIND THAN *I* HAVE...

AND IF HE'S CALLING YOU IN FOR *SPECIAL TREATMENT*...

I THINK YOU'LL *WISH* I'D PUT A *BULLET* IN THAT REPTILE BRAIN OF YOURS...

AND YOU *NEVER* HAD TO WAKE UP...

BAVERSTOCK FOUNDATION · NOW

MISTER HORN! NOTHING WOULD GIVE ME GREATER PLEASURE THAN TO SEND YOU *BACK IN TIME*, BUT WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN THE *CONSEQUENCES* OF DOING SO...

THE MAN IN THE CAR WAS CRUSHED LIKE -- LIKE AN *OVER-RIPE TOMATO.* UNRECOGNIZABLE. EVEN GIVEN YOUR MASS AND CONSTITUTION...

IT IS JUST NOT *POSSIBLE* FOR ME TO ADJUST THE *WARP COIL CALIBRATIONS* UNTIL I MYSELF HAVE SENT A *LIVING BEING* BACK IN TIME. AND ANY CREATURE THAT MAKES SUCH A TRIP WILL DIE *INSTANTLY.*

YES. YOU SAID AS MUCH EARLIER.

WE ARE HERE BECAUSE MISTER PURCHASE AND I STUDIED THE TRANSMISSION OF YOUR LITTLE EXPERIMENT..

NOT ONLY DID WE FIND THE CAR THAT CAME THROUGH YOUR MACHINE...

WE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT THE PILOT WAS... *KNOWN* TO US...

SO ENOUGH OF YOUR PROTESTATIONS, WHITAKER...

PURCHASE WILL FLY THE CAR AND ITS DRIVER THROUGH THE WARP COILS... I BELIEVE IT REAPPEARED HERE *THREE DAYS AGO?*

YOU MEAN--?

WE'D BE SENDING THAT MAN TO HIS *DEATH.* YOU-YOU WOULD MAKE US HIS MURDERERS!

HE IS *ALREADY* DEAD... CRUSHED LIKE AN OVER-RIPE TOMATO, I BELIEVE..

ACTIVATE YOUR APPARATUS, PROFESSOR. BE READY TO MAKE THE NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS.

AFRICA · TWENTY YEARS AGO

OBADIAH...?

IS THERE SOMETHING TROUBLING YOU?

YOUR WING CHUNG INSTRUCTOR TOLD ME YOU MISSED YOUR CLASS THIS MORNING.

SAHARA, YOU KNOW THAT THIS IS ALL A *CHARADE*. THEY *TELL* US THAT WE ARE FREE... YOUR PEOPLE TALK TO US OF *LIBERTY*, FREE WILL AND *EQUALITY*.

...YET IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE ARE STILL PRISONERS. THEY ARE *AFRAID* OF US. THEY THINK OF US AS *MONSTERS*.

NO, OBADIAH. YOUR CREATOR, *NIKKEN*, WAS THE REAL MONSTER.

HE MADE YOU *PRISONERS* IN YOUR OWN HEARTS AND MINDS. WE ONLY SEEK TO FREE YOU FROM THE CHAINS HE WROUGHT.

YOU *BELIEVE* THAT?

YOU ARE YOUNG AND FOOLISH, SAHARA.

THE RAIN MAY BEAT A LEOPARD'S SKIN, BUT IT DOES NOT WASH OUT THE SPOTS.

MAPPO TAUGHT YOU TO BE A COMPASSIONLESS KILLER, OBADIAH, BUT YOU'RE HERE SO THAT WE CAN HELP YOU REGAIN YOUR HUMANITY.

THAT IS YOUR MISTAKE, GIRL. YOU THINK OF ME AS A *MAN* TRAPPED IN THE BODY OF AN ANIMAL.

BUT I AM AN *ANIMAL*...

...*TRAPPED* IN THE BODY OF A *MAN*.

IT WOULD BE BETTER IF YOU WERE TO *KILL* US ALL. ONE SHOULD *DIE* PROUDLY WHEN IT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE TO *LIVE* PROUDLY...

WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU LIVE, OBADIAH. I... I AM HERE TO HELP YOU.

SHE'S A PRETTY GIRL ALL RIGHT, ISN'T SHE?

AND HORN'S NOT THE ONLY ELEPHANTMAN WHO'S SMITTEN BY HER, I CAN TELL YOU.

SHE SEEMS TO FEEL MORE KINSHIP WITH THOSE *MUNTS* THAN SHE DOES WITH HER OWN KIND.

AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO HER *MOTHER*, IT'S NOT REALLY SURPRISING, NOW IS IT?

NO, NOT SURPRISING AT ALL.

MISTER HORN, THE INTRUDERS FROM OUR LONG BEACH FACILITY ARE HERE.

IVORY TOWERS · THEN

THANK YOU, PURCHASE. BRING THEM IN.

OBADIAH! ISN'T *THIS* NICE...?

Y'KNOW, IF YOU WANTED US OVER FOR *DINNER*, IT'S TRADITIONAL TO SEND AN INVITATION.

I SEE YOU KEPT SOME OF THE *MARTIAN CRYSTALS!* THEY WOULDN'T FIT IN MY DESK DRAWER SO I GAVE MINE TO GOOD WILL.

FLASK.

MISS CASE.

EVERY TIME I SEE THE TWO OF YOU, IT SEEMS LIKE *TROUBLE* ISN'T VERY FAR BEHIND...

IT OFTEN OCCURS TO ME THAT MY LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH EASIER HAD I NOT SAVED YOU FROM *YVETTE* IN NORWAY.

HAS IT *OCCURRED* TO YOU THAT -- HAD YOU BEEN A BETTER *SHOT* -- I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD TO SAVE *YOUR* SORRY BUTT FROM HER RIGHT HERE TWO YEARS AGO?!

FLASK, IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, YVETTE TOOK HER *OWN* LIFE...

SOMETHING NEITHER YOU OR YOUR COLLEAGUE HAD THE *NERVE* TO DO, DESPITE THE THREAT SHE POSED TO US ALL...

I ALSO RECALL THAT MISS CASE WAS HERE ON ANOTHER OCCASION...

ACCOMPANIED BY THE *SEVERED HEAD* OF ONE OF OUR OWN KIND...

...CAUSING MY *WIFE* CONSIDERABLE *DISTRESS.*

HORN, WE'RE HERE RIGHT NOW BECAUSE YOU *BROUGHT* US HERE

BUT ALSO BECAUSE WE'RE TRYING -- TRYING TO *HELP* YOU!

AND WE REALLY DON'T HAVE MUCH *TIME!*

YOU ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE CAUGHT SNOOPING AROUND MY PROPERTY!

OBADIAH?

SAHARA!

HEIRONYMOUS, WHAT AN UNEXPECTED *PLEASURE*...

SAHARA, YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME, YOUR LIFE IS IN GREAT DANGER --

WHAT MADNESS--?!

MY DEAR, IGNORE THESE FOOLISH RAMBLINGS. I WILL SEE TO IT THAT FLASK AND HIS COMPANION WILL NOT DISTURB US AGAIN.

HUSH, MY LOVE.

HIERONYMOUS IS OUR KITH AND KIN. WHY WOULD WE TURN HIM AWAY?

IF HE HAS CONCERNS, WE MUST HEAR HIM OUT.

HIP... IF SHE'S ALIVE, MAYBE... MAYBE SHE'S SAFE NOW?

I MEAN, JUST WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO *DO*?

OUR LIVES ARE ALREADY FULL OF UNCOMFORTABLE CIRCUMSTANCE AND DIFFICULT MEMORIES...

I'M WINGIN' IT, VANITY, LIKE ALWAYS.

LET'S NOT ONE OF US DO ANYTHING THAT MIGHT CAUSE US FURTHER SADNESS AND REGRET...

I SECOND THAT...

UHHH...

WHAT THE...?

BAVERSTOCK FOUNDATION · NOW

UNNFF! AARGK!

THIS IS SERENGHETI! WHERE ARE YOU, DIRTBAG? I'M COMING FOR YOU AND TRUST ME -- YOU HAVE NO PLACE TO HIDE.

CELL MODE

I'M--I'M RIGHT BY THE BAVERSTOCK BUILDING! HORN FOUND ME --

HE'S-- I'M STRAPPED IN MY CAR -- GET OVER HERE AND GET ME *OUT!*

WELL HOW ABOUT THAT. IT LOOKS AS IF I'LL BE TAKING CARE OF *TWO* PIECES OF BUSINESS TODAY, ONCE AND FOR ALL...

HORN IS AT THE BAVERSTOCK FOUNDATION. WE WILL *MEET* HIM THERE.

PURCHASE. BRING HIM IN.

IMMEDIATELY. COURSE IS LOCKED IN.

WAIT... MY CAR IS MOVING...

NO... NO!

SHMM

TAKE YOUR READINGS, PROFESSOR...

I BELIEVE YOU SAID YOU CAN *COMMAND* TIME TO DO YOUR *BIDDING*...?

OH MY...

THE VEHICLE THAT CAME THROUGH THE COILS...

WE SENT IT THERE!

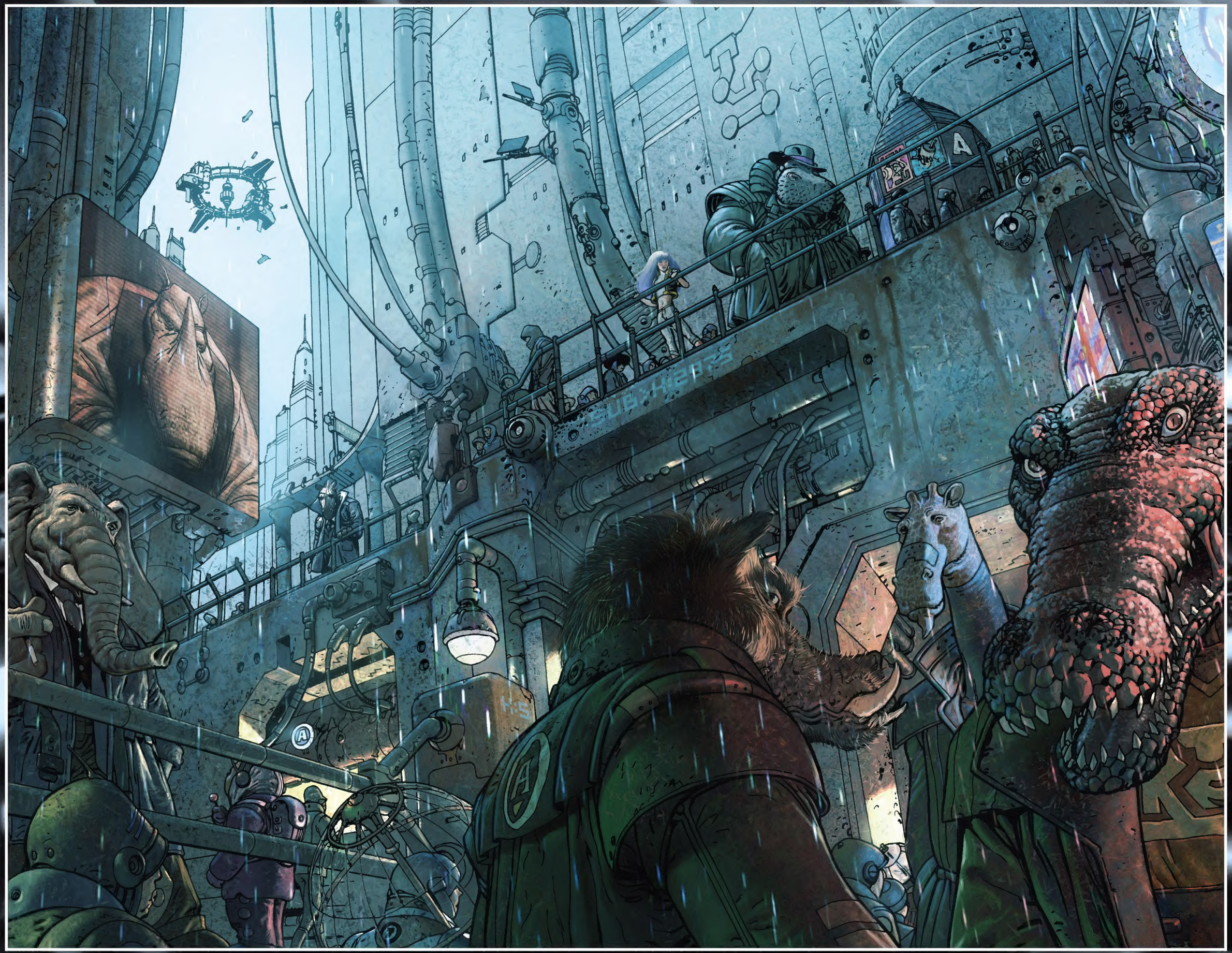
NOW TIME WILL FALL UNDER MY COMMAND.

To Be Concluded!

NEXT:

IRREVERSIBLE

DECEMBER 2013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